

NCA

VOC FOR PGM/FN  
BACKGROUNDER NO. 5-6321  
WEISS/TEHERAN

DECEMBER 13, 1978

IRAN: AFTER THE DEMONSTRATIONS  
(VOICE VERSION N-O-T AVAILABLE)

ANNCR:

SOMETHING ALMOST AS STRANGE AS THE SIGHT OF MORE THAN A MILLION TEHERANIS MARCHING THROUGH THE CAPITAL SUNDAY AND MONDAY, CHANTING SEDITIOUS ANTI-REGIME SLOGANS, WAS THE APPEARANCE OF NORMALITY THAT FOLLOWED. CHARLES WEISS HAS THIS BACKGROUND REPORT.

VOICE:

THE OPPOSITION TO THE SHAH, SPEARHEADED BY THE SHIITE MOSLEM CLERGY BUT EMBRACING A BROAD SPECTRUM OF IRAN'S POPULATION, FROM FARMERS AND LABORERS TO WHITE-COLLAR WORKERS AND INTELLECTUALS, HAD ACCEPTED THE TERMS LAID DOWN BY THE AUTHORITIES. THE ARMY WITHDREW ITS PRESENCE FROM THE CITY FOR THE RELIGIOUS PROCESSIONS TRADITIONAL TO THE SHURA HOLIDAYS, ON THE BASIS OF AN UNDERSTANDING THAT THE MARCHERS WOULD BE NON-VIOLENT. TEHRAN WAS A GOOD EXAMPLE OF HOW IT WORKED. THE ARMY PULLED BACK NORTH OF AN ARBITRARY LINE DRAWN ACROSS THE CITY. THE PROCESSION PROCEEDED ON SUCCESSIVE DAYS ALONG SHAH-REZA AVENUE, A BROAD THOROUGHFARE RUNNING TEN KILOMETERS THROUGH THE HEART OF THE CAPITAL.

THERE MAY HAVE BEEN NO VIOLENCE, IN THE SENSE OF DAMAGE TO LIFE OR PROPERTY, BUT IT WAS CLEARLY A MARCH DIRECTED AGAINST THE REGIME. RELIGION PLAYED A ROLE ONLY IN THE REPEATED REFERENCE IN THE AYATULLAH KHOMIENI, THE EXILED SHIITE LEADER WHO HAS COME TO SYMBOLIZE THE UNREST AGAINST THE SHAH. BUT THE SAME PEOPLE WHO WERE SO VEHEMENTLY CHANTING "DEATH TO THE SHAH" WERE BACK AT THE SHOPS, THEIR FACTORY BENCHES BY TUESDAY.

WHAT HAPPENED OVER THE ASHURA PRODUCED SOME NEW ELEMENTS IN THE CONTEST BETWEEN THE SHAH AND THOSE WHO ARE TRYING TO UNSEAT HIM. BUT IT WAS HARDLY THE DECISIVE SHOWDOWN THAT HAD BEEN EXPECTED. IT DID SHOW THAT THAT OPPOSITION HAS THE SUPPORT OF A LARGE SEGMENT OF THE PEOPLE, PARTLY ON RELIGIOUS GROUNDS AND PARTLY BECAUSE OF DISSATISFACTION WITH THE SHAH'S POLICIES. IT ALSO SHOWED THAT THE SHAH KNEW BETTER THAN TO TRY TO FIGHT THIS FORMIDABLE COMBINATION ON UNFAVORABLE GROUND -- DURING THE ASHURA PERIOD. ONE KNOWLEDGEABLE OBSERVER OF THE IRANIAN SCENE SAID THAT WHAT HAPPENED ONLY DEMONSTRATED ONCE AGAIN HOW DEPENDENT THE SHAH IS ON THE ARMY. HE BELIEVES THE SITUATION WILL CONTINUE TO SIMMER BUT HE SAYS SO LONG AS THE MILITARY REMAINS LOYAL, THE SHAH WILL KEEP HIS CROWN. HE DOES NOT EXPECT A CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT TO REPLACE THE PRESENT MILITARY CABINET IN THE NEAR FUTURE.

A SPOKESMAN OF THE NATIONAL FRONT PARTY, THE LARGEST POLITICAL OPPOSITION GROUP, SAID MUCH THE SAME THING, BUT IN A TONE OF REGRET. TALKING ABOUT THE ASHURA PROCESSION, HE SAID IT DEMONSTRATED THE UNIVERSALITY OF THE PARTY STAND THAT THE REGIME IS ILLEGAL AND HAS TO GO. SINCE THE SHAH DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE GOTTEN THE MESSAGE, HE WENT ON, THERE'S NOTHING LEFT TO DO BUT TO GO ON STRUGGLING. HE SAID THE PEOPLE WILL CONTINUE THEIR STRIKE, WHICH DOES NOT DO ANYONE ANY GOOD -- NOT THE IRANIANS, NOT THE SHAH, AND NOT THE WEST. ACCORDING TO MOST OBSERVERS HERE, THE TIME FOR THE NEXT CONFRONTATION WILL AGAIN BE CHOSEN ACCORDING TO THE ISLAMIC CALENDAR. IF THAT PROVES TO BE THE CASE, IT WON'T BE FOR MANY MONTHS.